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In Senate.

**SPEECH OF MR. ROBBINS,**

(OF RHODE-ISLAND,)

**ON THE PANAMA MISSION.**

MARCH, 1826.

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## PANAMA MISSION.



Substance of the remarks made by M. ROBBINS, of Rhode-Island, on the question to agree to the resolutions reported by the Committee on Foreign Relations, that "it is not expedient to send Ministers to the Congress of American Nations at Panama."

Mr. ROBBINS said, the honorable gentleman from Tennessee (Mr. WHITE) called upon us (by us, I mean those who have not adopted the reasoning of the report,) to show wherein the reasoning of the report was not conclusive; implying, that we were either to do this, or to adopt the resolution; as the resolution was the necessary result of the reasoning, if that was conclusive. I do not agree that this is the necessary alternative; for an argument may fail of convincing the mind, may be felt as very fallacious, and yet the mind be unable to detect its fallacy, and unable to expose that fallacy, either to itself or to others. Berkley's argument against the existence of matter is a memorable instance of the kind; it convinced nobody, yet it puzzled every body. It confounded all the philosophers and metaphysicians of the early part of the last century; many of them labored hard at its refutation, but labored in vain. Reed at last hit upon the clew that unravelled the subtle web; at least, he conceived that he had; and, for a while, it was admitted that he had; but now it seems again to be doubted whether his refutation is not itself refutable, and is not more seeming than solid. Suppose

Berkley here now, to put to the honorable gentleman from Tennessee the same dilemma which he would put to us; and say to him, now refute my argument, or adopt my conclusion; admit that there is no material world, or refute the reasoning by which I demonstrate that there is none; admit that the chamber in which we sit, that the columns which adorn it, are not material objects, external to us, but merely ideas in the mind. My honorable friend would say, I believe, "Mr. Berkley, your alternative is a hard one, and as unreasonable as hard. I feel that your conclusion is false, though I find myself unable to detect the fallacy of your reasoning. You will give me leave, therefore, to believe in the information of my senses, and to let your subtleties alone."

Besides, an argument may be true, and unanswerable because it is true, yet not be satisfactory, for it may be outweighed by other arguments, equally true and unanswerable, and more satisfactory because of more weight. This is the case as to all questions depending on a balance of probabilities; as questions of political expediency do; of which this is one. But if we were reduced to the alternative, to which the gentleman from Tennessee would reduce us, still I think we should not be compelled to adopt the resolution; for that reasoning, subtle and ingenious as it is, almost *Berkleyen*, and imposing as it is, at first blush, will be found, upon closer examination and reflection, to be far from conclusive.

It is altogether hypothetical, and the hypothesis is no where supported. It is not even attempted to be supported in the report. In this way, you may prove any thing; for "*supposito quo libet sequiter, quid libet.*" If you are at liberty to make your premises what you please, you may make your conclusions what you please, and make them

necessary. It is hypothetical altogether, as to the nature and character of that body, the Congress at Panama. It supposes that body to be, or is to become, a confederate organized sovereignty, possessing the prerogatives of sovereignty; possessing powers supreme and final, on all subjects within the sphere of its action, but that sphere to be undefined, at least as far as we know. This is implied throughout the report; many passages might be cited in proof. I will select only one as a sample.

In page 4th, are these words: "it was, therefore, much to be desired, and certainly to have been expected, that before the *destinies* of the United States should be committed to the deliberation and decision of a Congress, composed, not of our own citizens, but of the Representatives of many different nations, that the objects of such deliberations should be most accurately stated and defined, and clearly and distinctly marked out."

Clearly implying that our destinies would be committed to the decisions of that body, in case we were represented there. If so, that body must have supreme and final powers on these subjects of their deliberations; and the subjects must involve the destinies of this country. It must be, as I said before, a confederate, organized, and absolute sovereignty, within the sphere of its action, whatever that sphere might be. This is the supposition of the report; the assumption on which its reasonings are bottomed, the principle from which its alarming dangers are deduced; and neither the reasoning nor the consequences can be supported on any other supposition. Now, if this was the fact—if this Congress was, or was to be, an organized sovereignty, as it is assumed to be, the present question would not be a question of expediency, but a question of constitutional power. Could we send delegates to become constituent members of a foreign sover-

eignty? I take it to be very clear, that we could not; for that would be to transfer a portion of the sovereignty of this nation to a foreign power. Can we alienate the sovereignty of this nation, or any portion of it? Not only alienate, but subject the sovereignty of this nation to the sovereignty so alienated? Such an idea is too absurd for refutation, and needs only to be mentioned to be rejected. If it was a fact that this Congress was to be an organized sovereignty, the committee should have stopped there—should have reported the simple fact, and have spared themselves the labor of all their subtle reasonings, of all their detail of probable dangers; for surely we wanted no reasonings to convince us of the inexpediency of transferring a portion of the national sovereignty to a foreign power, and of subjecting the residue to the control of that power; and no exaggerated pictures of national dangers, to deter us from committing such an act of national suicide. If it be a fact that this Congress is to be this organized sovereignty, possessing those sovereign prerogatives, and to exercise this supremacy over us, let the same gentleman who drew this report, or any other gentleman, now show it, and the Senate must reject the proposed mission with one voice.

But this supposition, made by the report, is entirely gratuitous, and has not any warrant whatever, from any of the documents on which it was founded: it is not only without evidence, but contrary to all the evidence. It appears from these documents, that this congress is to be a mere diplomatic council, with no power whatever, but as such. It is to possess no one attribute of sovereignty; no legislative power, no executive power, no judicial power; no power whatever but that of an advisory council. This council is not to form the confederation of the South-American nations, as the honor-

able gentleman from South-Carolina (Mr. HAYNE) supposes. That confederation is already formed, and this council is appointed by it; each nation appointing two plenipotentiaries to be of it. That confederation is formed by their treaties, made between themselves; but still it leaves each nation an independent sovereignty; independent in all its foreign relations, independent in all its internal regulations, and only united in a common league, offensive and defensive, as to common dangers. It was absurd, therefore, to suppose, as the report supposes, that when they had provided with such a jealous care for their separate and absolute sovereignties, that they have subjected those sovereignties to the sovereignty of a Congress, and that each sovereignty had thus become a *felo de se*. Nothing can be further from the fact: See article 6th, in the treaty of Colombia and Chile; article 16th, in the treaty of Colombia and Peru; article 18th, in the treaty of Colombia and Guatemala; and article 17th, in the treaty of Colombia and Mexico. The provisions are precisely the same in substance, and nearly the same in words, in all the treaties. It is as follows:—I recite it from the treaty last mentioned,—“this compact of perpetual union, league, and confederation, shall not, in anywise, affect the exercise of the national sovereignty of either contracting party, in regard to its laws and form of government, or its foreign relations.” This council is to be composed of plenipotentiaries, two from each nation. They are called plenipotentiaries in every instance in which they are mentioned or referred to at all, without one single exception.

In article 14th, Treaty of Colombia and Chile, they are so called—The Congress is to be an Assembly of the States, “composed of their *Plenipotentiaries*.” In article 3d, Treaty of Colombia and Peru, they are so called—The Congress is to

be an assembly of the States, "composed of their *Plenipotentiaries*." In article 17th, Treaty of Colombia and Guatemala, they are so called—The Congress is to be an assembly of the States, "composed of their *Plenipotentiaries*." In article 14th, Treaty of Colombia and Mexico, they are so called—The Congress is to be an assembly of the States "composed of their *Plenipotentiaries*." So, wherever they are incidentally mentioned, they are called *Plenipotentiaries*; as in the 3d article of the Treaty of Colombia and Chile. It provides that the contingents therein mentioned shall be adjusted at the meeting of the *Plenipotentiaries*. Are plenipotentiaries invested with the powers of government and sovereignty? The idea is preposterous. Will it be said, they may be? No, they cannot be, as such. Besides, it is expressly provided, in every one of these Treaties, how they are to be commissioned. They are to be commissioned as as *Plenipotentiaries*, and not otherwise. In article 12th of the Treaty of Colombia and Mexico, it is provided in these words—"A Congress shall be formed, to which each party shall send two *Plenipotentiaries*, commissioned in the same form and manner as are observed towards ministers of equal grade to foreign nations:" and this is, *mutatis mutandis*, the provision of all the Treaties. And so far are these *Plenipotentiaries* from being invested with the powers of government, that they are not even invested with the power to protect themselves; but are to owe that protection to the State in which they assemble; and this is expressly stipulated for in all the Treaties. And what is that protection to be? It is the protection due to the sacred and inviolable character of *Plenipotentiaries*. This is what is stipulated. See article 15 of the treaty of Colombia and Mexico; it provides that "the Isthmus of Panama being an integral part of Colombia,

and the most suitable point for the meeting of Congress, this Republic promises to furnish to the *Plenipotentiaries* of the Congress, all the facilities demanded by hospitality among a kindred people, and by the sacred characters of *Ambassadors*." The same stipulation is exacted by all the other nations from Colombia, and by her from them, if the Congress should be compelled to remove its seat. Each nation exacts a guarantee for the protection of its *Plenipotentiaries*; clearly proving that they are to be merely *Plenipotentiaries*; merely a diplomatic Congress or Council, and incapable of protecting themselves.

Besides, all the Treaties in the stipulations for the formation of this Congress, and in defining its duties, and its office, limit the Congress to the power of counsel merely. Article 14th in the Treaty of Colombia and Mexico, which is but a transcript of the same provision in the other Treaties, and which defines the office of the Congress to be, "To serve as a *Council* on great occasions; a point of union in common danger; a faithful interpreter of Public Treaties in cases of misunderstanding; and an arbitrator and conciliator of disputes and differences."

This is all the grant of powers which the Congress have made to them; this is the whole of its Constitution; for though it is said, in the 3d Article of the Treaty of Colombia and Chile, they are to adjust the contingents therein mentioned; and in the 14th Article of the same Treaty, that they are to cement the intimacy of the union between the States, these offices are virtually included in the above definition of their duties. Now, how is it possible to say that here is a grant of any powers, except those of counsel? The Congress is expressly made to serve as a council on great occasions; not as a government on great occasions, or on any occasions, but as a council. Will it be said

that these occasions may embrace military and naval operations. Be it so ; still it is only counsel as to them ; not power to order, not power to direct them. The question is, whether they can do any thing more than advise. They are "to serve as a point of union in time of danger." This makes them the central point of communication, and the vehicle of intelligence to the allied sovereignties. Surely this is nothing more than the power of advising. They are "to be a faithful interpreter of Treaties in cases of misunderstanding." By this they are to give opinion and advice; nothing more. Will it be pretended that they have not only the power to interpret Treaties, but to enforce the interpretation. Nothing can be more groundless. There is not a syllable that implies any power whatever to enforce their interpretation, "and as an arbitrator and conciliator of disputes and differences."

Their treaties were the only source out of which could arise any disputes and differences to be arbitrated ; they being independent sovereignties, and meaning to remain such. And surely arbitration in such a case implies nothing more than opinion and recommendation ; and what proves it is, that they are to be the conciliators, as well as arbitrators. At any rate, arbitration is not judiciary power, strictly speaking ; which implies execution as well as adjudication. As to adjusting contingents, what is that but an agreement of the parties, by their agents, what the contribution of each shall be ? Is that a power to enforce the contribution ? No one will pretend it. As to cementing the intimacy of their relations, that, surely, is the office of friendship, not of force. Will it be said the body will be permanent ? What has that to do with the question of its powers ?—a council may be permanent ; a power may be temporary. The Dictatorship of Rome

was a temporary power. Will it still be contended that this Congress is a confederated sovereignty? What one prerogative of sovereignty has it? Can it raise armies? No they cannot. Can they equip fleets? No they cannot. Can they command either the one or the other? No they cannot. Can they levy and collect taxes? No they cannot; not a cent can they levy, not even for their own subsistence; that they must owe to their appointments; and had they no means of living but by their own powers, they must starve to death. Can they declare war, or conclude peace? They can do neither. Can they regulate the relations of those nations with foreign powers? No they cannot. Can they regulate any subject whatever of their internal policy? Not any. They cannot even advise on these subjects. Can they coin money and regulate the currency? No; were they to attempt to do this, they make themselves criminal, and expose themselves to punishment. Can they pass any law, or execute any? They cannot. Have they the power of protecting the society around them? They have not even the power of protecting themselves. They can do none of these things; for the simple reason, that they are not a government, nor intended to be a government, but merely a Congress of diplomatic agents, for consultation and advice.

Can any one suppose that, in investigating the nature and character of this Congress, we are to look to any thing but the Treaties by which it is constituted and defined? or that it can be other than what those constitutional acts make it? Newspaper speculations about it, reviews upon it, whether North American or South American, proclamations that allude to it incidentally—are these to be taken as lights in this inquiry? In every point of view, they are useless: if they agree with those constitutional acts, they are not wanted; if they differ

from them, they are not entitled to the least weight. It is equally unimportant to this inquiry, what this or that minister from those nations may presume may be the subjects of discussion by that Congress. Whatever those subjects may be, the constitution of that Congress cannot be other than those constitutional acts make it. Taking, then, these treaties as our guide, and only guide, nothing can be more clear to us than that the report is entirely mistaken in supposing that this Congress is to be a confederate sovereignty.

Now, had the report attempted to predicate the dangers with which it would alarm us, on the existence of a mere Diplomatic Council; a mere Congress of Ambassadors, the attempt must have entirely failed: it would have been hardly possible to prevent its appearing even ridiculous: for, pray how can such a Congress be pregnant with such dangers? How, in the first place, would it make out that the destinies of this country were committed to its keeping; to be controlled, to be regulated by it, to be dependent upon it? How, I ask? Certainly not by logic; logic would be of no use here, wonderful as that weapon is when wielded by the hand that is said to have drawn up this report; here it must have failed him entirely. No, nothing short of magic could give even the semblance of connection between such a Council and such results. He must have been a magician, and have thrown before our eyes all the illusions of enchantment, before we could see, or seem to see, such results; seem to see a few men, not over a dozen, without being clothed with any power whatever, except that of Counsel, sitting in conclave on the dividing line of the two hemispheres, and controlling the destinies of both. Why, the phrensies of Don Quixotte would be sober reason, compared to the extravagance of such a delusion.

Then pray how would such a Council compromit our neutral relations? To show this, would involve the report in the difficult task of proving that the exercise of a right is itself a wrong; for no one will say that we have not a right to send a Minister to an independent nation; and it amounts to nothing more. If we may send to one independent nation, we may send to several independent nations; and it makes no difference, as to the right, whether they are confederated, or not confederated. A Minister of course is to meet Minister; this is the mode, and the only mode, of communication between nations; and surely it makes no difference as to the right, whether he meets the Minister separately in his own nation, or meets him conjointly with others in another place; still it is the same diplomatic intercourse, and the exercise of the same right. And are not these South American nations independent nations? Why, even Spain herself is obliged to consider them as independent nations, as to all the world, except as to herself; the law of nations obliges her so to consider them. If these States commit violations upon the rights of neutral nations, is Spain responsible for these violations? No—she herself disclaims the responsibility; and leaves the injured neutral to look to these States for his indemnity. These nations being independent in point of fact, are independent as to all intents and purposes, as to us, and as to all the world, except as to Spain herself; and we have precisely the same right to send a Minister there, that we have to send a Minister to Great Britain or to France; the same to send one to Panama, as to send one to Mexico. The mission then is a matter of plain unquestionable right. But, though Spain has not a right to complain of it as a violation of our neutral relations with her, she may consider it as unfriendly to her. She may so. When we recognised the independence of these nations, she consi-

dered it as unfriendly towards her ; so also when we sent Ministers to those nations ; so also when we made treaties with them. But still we adopted these measures ; and why ? Because in so doing we violated no right of Spain ; and because in so doing we pursued the true policy of our own country. Even England, connected as she is with Spain, who alone sustained that monarchy against the mighty efforts of Bonaparte, whose relations with her are of the most intimate character, even England has done the same thing ; and why ? Because she had the right, and found it her interest to do so, disregarding all the complaints of Spain of unfriendliness in these proceedings. The question of this mission (the mission itself being an unquestionable right) is to be determined by considerations of policy ; not by its possible or probable effects on the feelings of Spain, which we have uniformly disregarded, when right and policy united in recommending measures of national interest.

But the instructions of the Minister may be such as to enable him to concur in and promote plans that may compromit our neutral relations. They may. So may the instructions to every foreign minister we have to every foreign power in the world. But what is our security against this ? It is the Executive discretion, and the Executive responsibility. In the nature of things, we can have no other. In this instance, we have, moreover, the Executive pledge, that our neutral relations shall not be compromitted. He says, his Ministers shall not engage us to any alliance, nor to any project importing hostility to any nation. Then, if our neutral relations should be violated, the Executive must violate his pledge, or his Ministers must violate their instructions ; and surely no one will presume either—at least no one will act upon that presumption.

The Report would persuade us that the destinies

of Cuba and Porto Rico are somehow connected with this mission—or with this Congress: that their conquest is to be attempted by force: or their independence produced by their blacks being excited to revolt. This supposes, first, that these plans of conquest or revolution are contingent—depending upon the event of a Congress: if no Congress—then, not to be undertaken: if a Congress—then, to be undertaken. And stranger still is the further contingent depending on the event of *a* mission or *no* mission: that the Congress, without this mission, will not undertake them: but, with this mission, will undertake them. It supposes these strange things: for if those plans—Congress or no Congress—mission or no mission—are resolved on, it is idle to urge that as an objection, which has no connection with either fact. Whether these plans of conquest or revolution are resolved on, or will be resolved on, or resolved against, we know not: but this we know—it is a question with which that Congress can have nothing to do. It is not within their commission; nor has their commission any reference to it. The powers of war and peace, and all other prerogatives of sovereignty, are expressly retained by the States. This Congress has no participation in them whatever. All their military, and their naval operations, whether for offence or defence, separate or confederate, are concerted and directed by the States themselves, independently of this Congress. This Congress has not the least particle of authority with regard to them. But if this body had delegated to it the military and naval concerns of the confederacy, and the direction of their military and naval operations, as the Report erroneously supposes, would not our remonstrances, made upon the spot, in that body and to that body, be likely to have some effect? Would not that be the very place where to exert our influence to prevent those attempts? And

would it be prudent to forego the chances, and them the only favourable chances, of effecting so important an object to our country, as would be afforded by this mission? I think not. The honorable gentleman from South-Carolina supposes, even then, our minister, by going to the Congress, would compromit our neutrality with Spain? What, if he went there, among other things, for the express purpose of preventing an attempt against the possessions of Spain? Would an office of friendship to her be a breach of neutrality towards her? Would an effort to protect her Islands from invasion, be an act of hostility towards her? Will the learned gentleman say, that such is the doctrine of the law of nations on the subject of neutrality? Upon re-examination and reflection, I am confident he will not.

It is evident, that our government has labored with much anxiety to prevent these or any enterprises against the Islands of Cuba and Porto Rico; has still that object much at heart, and is bent on preventing them, if possible. Yet the very measure which the Executive has proposed, among other things, to augment his influence with those nations, to be exerted if occasion should require, the report represents as a measure that may become the means of promoting the very evil he is striving to prevent. How can it be, unless the Executive shall change his views? Or unless his Ministers counteract his views, and favor those enterprises?—The honorable gentleman from Virginia, who pourtrayed to us the calamities which might follow on in the train of these events, to affect our fellow-citizens in the South—who exhibited those calamities in a manner so affecting to every heart—who transported us to that scene of horrors which he described, and made us even seem to hear the cries of death from the cradle of reposing infancy; even he is not more anxious than our Executive to prevent these enter-

prises against Cuba and Porto Rico. It is strange, that, agreeing with the Executive in object, you should so differ in your opinion of the means! It is strange, that you should judge the means, which he deems useful, not only not useful, but detrimental to your common object! The President proposes means. How can that gentleman think them useless? Were he himself in that Congress, and that Congress were to agitate the project of exciting the blacks of Cuba to revolt; and that gentleman were to represent the calamities of the measure, to arise to his friends and their friends, in North America; to renew the picture of those calamities, as he had represented them to us, would it have no effect? My life upon it, I was going to say, the project would be abandoned. I do not know the gentlemen proposed for this mission; but this I know, that if they possess his powers of statement, and his energy of description, or powers any way resembling them, that their mission cannot be useless to the true interests of this country.

The gentleman has represented us of the north as coldly insensible to the possible perils of those of the south; as looking with stoical indifference to those perils; and as not unfavourable to the projects that would increase them. I should be sorry to believe that there was any foundation for this opinion. They mistake, I think, a spirit which is very partial and limited, for the general spirit of the north. I know that there is a wild spirit of fanaticism existing in that country, but not peculiar to it; the offspring of a virtuous sensibility, but unenlightened and unregulated by reason; bigotted to its abstractions, and disposed to push them universally, regardless of those considerations which ought to modify and to limit them; that sees nothing in circumstances that ought to check or control them; circumstances that control every thing, and are not to be controlled; that, to

realize these abstractions, would risk the overthrow of the order, together with the happiness of a whole society ; including that of those who are the objects of its visionary benevolence. I know that this spirit is formidable, and to be feared ; but this is not the spirit of the north ; all reasonable and reflecting men there (as the gentleman from South-Carolina did us the justice to admit) abjure this spirit. They are not to learn that even the virtues themselves, when pushed to their ultimate extremes, cease to be virtues, and operate as vices ; that every society must conform to its circumstances ; that this is its law ; and not the abstract rights of humanity in any imaginary state of nature. They know that if two distinct people exist in the same society, equally numerous, or nearly so, that one must be subordinate to the other ; that not only the well-being, but the very being, of that society depends upon it ; that if they forcibly and suddenly were put into a state of equality, a struggle would instantly ensue to re-establish the former condition ; that it must be re-established, or that the one or the other People must be extinguished. The supremacy of the one People and the subjection of the other, is the necessary condition of such a society ; and any attempt forcibly and suddenly to change it, is to attempt to change the nature of things ; and, however benevolent in intention, is criminal in fact. The gentleman, then, is mistaken, if he supposes that we see with indifference any events that would threaten them with this danger ; such, for instance, as those revolutions in the islands of Cuba and Porto Rico, which he has imagined, and which he deprecates so much and so justly. And if we do not sympathize in his fears, it is because we are persuaded that this measure, instead of leading to those revolutions, will have a contrary tendency ; and is the best of all possible precautionary measures in our power to prevent them.

So much for this report. Let the honorable gentleman from Tennessee still say, if he will, that its reasoning is conclusive. The report says, that this mission will link our destinies with those of the Spanish American nations, and that the Congress at Panama will control both. I ask, is this proved? Is not the contrary made evident? The report says that the mission will or may compromit our neutral relations; I ask, is this proved? Is not the contrary made evident? The report says, the mission may be unfavorable to our policy of preventing the conquest or the revolutions of the Islands of Cuba and Porto Rico—I ask, is this proved? Is not the contrary made evident?

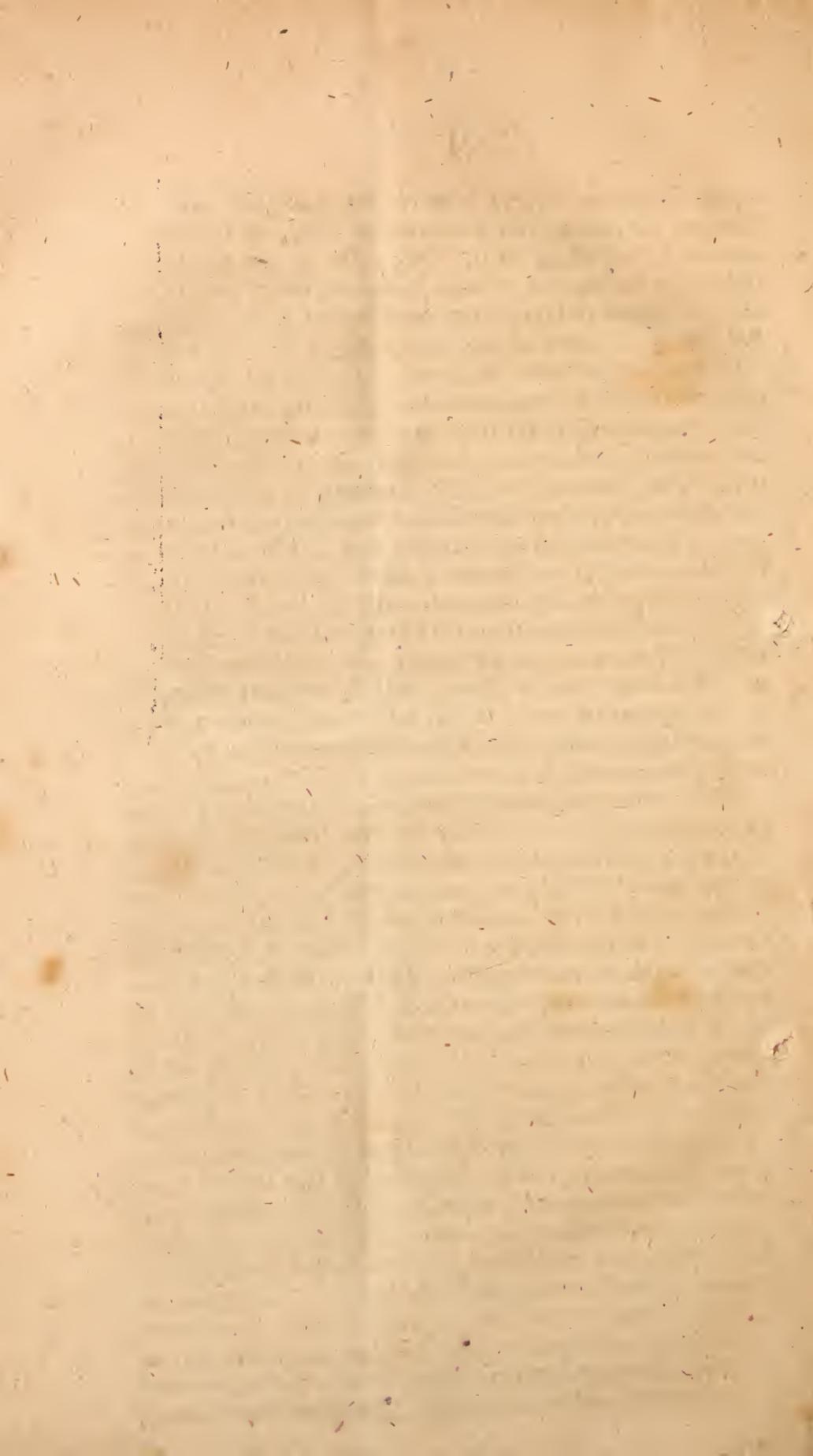
If now I am asked, in my turn, if any certain advantage is certainly to arise from this mission; I answer, that the good of any mission whatever is, and must be, in a great measure, contingent; depending upon those conjunctures of human affairs to be disclosed in the progress of human events; and which are beyond the reach of human foresight; the conjunctures may be such that the mission may be the means of doing great good, or of averting great evil. The probability of such results may be a sufficient warrant for the mission.

The friendship of those nations, let gentlemen abuse them as they will, is very important to us; and it is our interest to strengthen its bands by all the proper means in our power. It is evident that this mission will be highly acceptable to them, and will have the effect of strengthening those bands, beyond any other expedient we could employ, so little onerous to ourselves? Is not that friendship important to us? Look for a moment at the situation of things. Nature seems to have formed the two hemispheres for mutual commerce; and to us, our commerce with them is immensely valuable, especially when the present is taken in connection with the future. It is only since the era of their inde-

pendence, now but a few years, that our commerce there had a beginning; and it already constitutes no inconsiderable portion of all our foreign commerce, immense as that commerce is: and the day is coming, and is not distant, when it may constitute by far the most valuable portion of that commerce; the most valuable in itself; and especially the most valuable for its effects on every branch of the national industry, and on every interest in every part of our widely extended empire. The causes of these results are planted in the nature of things, as might be shown, were this the proper occasion. We all recollect the report of the Committee on Commerce, on the subject of discriminating duties; and the general views of our foreign commerce exhibited by their chairman; his very able comments upon that report; his very interesting illustrations; but especially his animating development of our commercial prospects; but nothing, on that occasion so much excited my admiration as his view of this portion of our commerce, particularly in the rapidity of its increase. It must be so. These nations now are nations of freemen, and left to their own energies; and the energies of regulated freedom never fails to carry forward a nation with astonishing rapidity in the career of national prosperity. Their population is great at present, upwards of thirty millions, if I mistake not, with an unbounded scope for its increase, and possessed of all the means which have been found to accelerate its progress. For this great and growing commerce we have the world for competitors; but none can contend with us on equal ground, if we are attentive to all the means of securing all the advantages of our situation. England is our great rival for this commerce. She is exerting all the arts of her policy, to gain the advantage, to preoccupy the ground, to establish her connections, and to secure the command of their markets. Had she received the invi-

tation which we have, I believe she would not have debated so much, nor hesitated so long, as to her interest in acceding to it. No. She is too quick-sighted in seeing, too prompt in seizing every advantage, to have delayed her acceptance a moment. All the merchants of our country, so far as I am informed—intelligent of their interests, and of the means that favor them—attracted by this opening and promising field for their enterprises, are warmly and eagerly desirous of the adoption of this measure. The sentiments of the country at large, in the eastern quarter of the Union at least, appear to have taken the same direction; not perhaps from the most enlightened views of all the considerations connected with the subject, but impelled by that feeling which carries freemen so naturally and so forcibly to fraternize with freemen, in whatever part of the world. As the mission will be without harm, or the danger of harm, I think the consideration of the public sentiment ought to weigh something with us in determining this question.

The theory of our constitution charges the Executive with the care of our foreign relations, and of the public interests connected therewith; it supposes him intimately acquainted with all those interests, and therefore possessed of the means of forming a correct opinion of the measures conducive to their advancement. This opinion, though not binding as authority, is yet, I think, entitled to much weight, as well as to much respect, in our deliberations. We have the Executive opinion in this case, under circumstances that entitle it to peculiar consideration. The credit of the Government, in the estimation of all those nations, is in a degree connected with the adoption of this measure; and that estimation ought not, in my opinion, lightly to be forfeited, nor unnecessarily impaired. I hope, therefore, that the resolution reported by the committee will not be adopted.



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